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Nehru Bal Pustakalaya

PAPPU'S PROBLEM

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The factory siren sounds all of a sudden. Frightened of the terrible sound, Pappu calls out to his Mother from his study table. Only a few days ago, his Mother had told him that a siren was generally sounded to inform about a war or a calamity. His Mother was yet to respond when there is a deafening sound and the whole house is shaken. The glass studded doors and windows begin to rattle.

Frightened, Pappu cries out loudly, "I will die," and runs to his Mother who is cooking food in the kitchen. Pappu clings to her.

Seeing him growing pale out of fear, Mother caresses his face with her hand lovingly and says, "It's only the motor tyre that has burst? You should not get so frightened! When our house is situated along the road, there will be plenty of noise!"

Taking a deep breath Pappu asks, "and that siren!"

"What a fool! Did you not listen to the radio yesterday? That there would be an occasional sounding of siren for exercise!" Reassured thus, Pappu smiles and goes back to study.

Pappu's house is situated across the road leading to the zoo. He often heard his Father claim that this was once a desolate road. In 1973, the capital of Assam was shifted from Shillong to Dispur in Guwahati. Since then the traffic on this road increased. The noise and din also went up. With the rise in population day after day, the number of houses also increased.

Many years back Pappu's Father had taken a plot of land and built this small house. With father, mother, brother and sister, there are altogether five members in Pappu's family. Pappu is a



student of sixth standard. He studies in the drawing room located at the frontage of the small house. If the guests sit for long, Pappu gets annoyed and walks out. Sometimes, his Father talks to people from the verandah itself to dismiss them.

"Tring...tring...tring..." The door-bell almost pierces Pappu's ears. Uff! Who can it be? He had just taken to studying. Responding to the bell, his brother and sister also come out of the other room. Pappu opens the door. Oh, it is Sinhaji's domestic servant, asking for a pickaxe. Pappu gets angry. He has created havoc for such a petty thing!

"Mummy, Mummy... Mili's house-bell sounds like a piano. What a sweet voice it has! One would like to hear it again and again. And the bell at Appu's house lets out a bird-like sound. How nice it sounds! Please bring one such bell for our house also!"

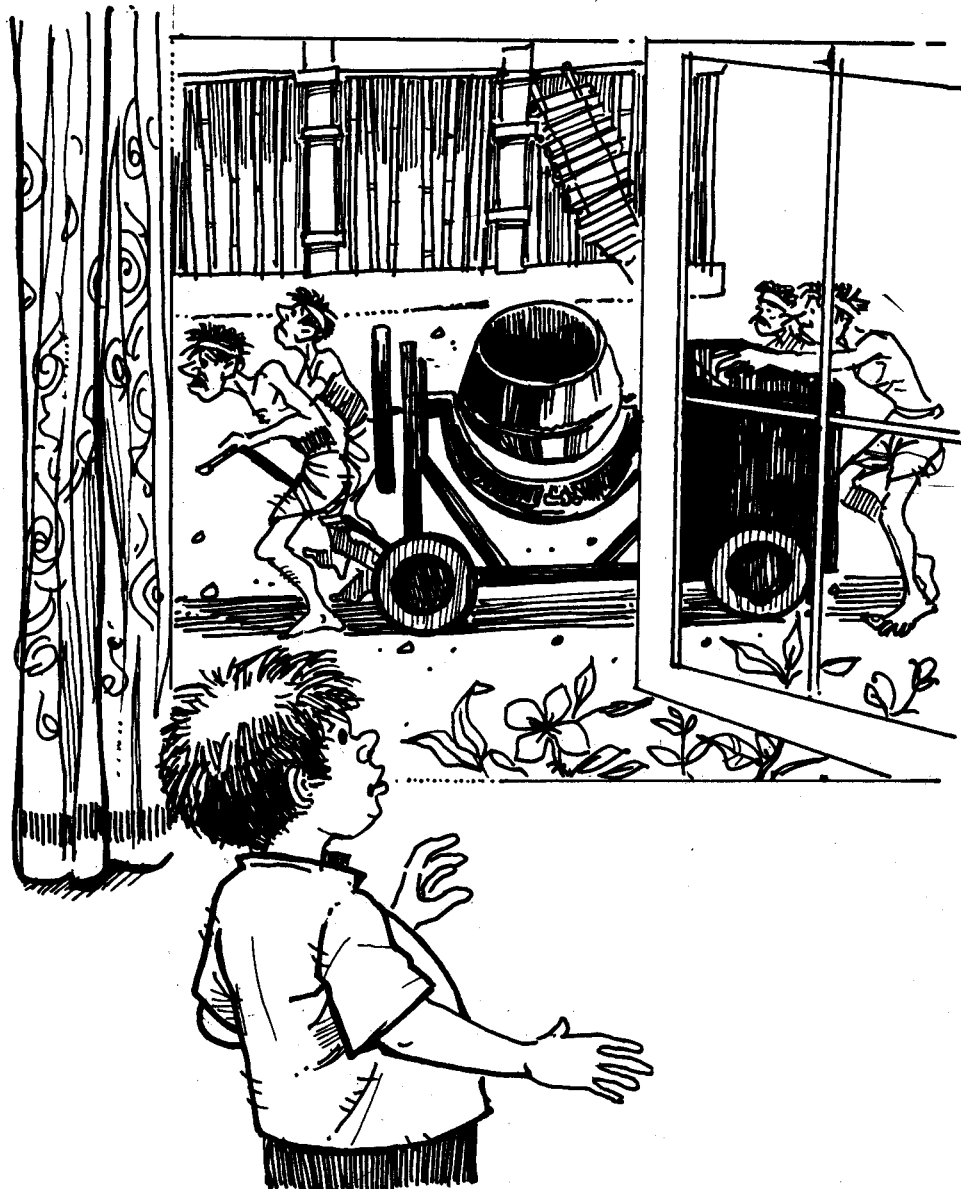
"We shall overcome... some day... oh...hoo... deep in my heart... I do believe..." The neighbour's radio sings. Pappu is delighted. He likes this song very much. Humming along, he sneaks into the kitchen. He peeps into some jars and takes out roasted grams from one. Popping them into his mouth, he goes back to study, reading aloud from an English book.

"Bananas, bananas!" Shouts the hawker stopping near the gate.

"Mummy, do you need bananas?" Pappu asks his Mother, distractedly. Mother goes out saying 'yes'.

After that, the vegetable-vendour, the egg-seller, the fish-seller, the scrap man—countless vendours pass by. All the time shouting to attract customers. Pappu tries his level best to concentrate on his studies but in vain.

"Gharang...gharang...gharang...gharang..." This sound is



definitely pounding. It gradually picks up. Pappu feels his head being knocked harder and harder as the sound comes nearer and nearer. Peeping out of the window, he sees some labourers pushing a big round enclosed object on wheels. "What is this, Papa? How strange it sounds!" Pappu enquires.

"This is a mixer machine. It has been brought today to set the ceiling of Boraji's new house. After a while you will see how this machine will mix stones, sand, cement and water."

A four-storey house of an engineer is being constructed on the plot of land adjoining Pappu's house. To lay the ceiling, nearly eighty labourers have gathered. As the machine arrives all of them take to work. They begin to pour sand, gravel, etc. with baskets into the machine. There is a dumping sound which hurts Pappu's ears.

As soon as the labourers fill the machine, it rattles as the material inside begins to circulate. The rumblings accompanied by the din of the labourers, make such a noise that it becomes impossible to hear anything else.

Pappu can not tolerate all this! He is no more in a mood to study. He throws his books on the table and comes out of the room. These kinds of clattering sounds always affect him adversely. On other occasions, he is unable to study due to the blaring music from neighbouring cassette shops. The extent to which he is lagging behind makes him angry. In remorse, he retires to the backyard and leans against the wall.

"What are you doing here, standing quietly?" His paternal Uncle, who had come on a visit, enquires on seeing him standing this way. Understanding his plight, Mother explains, "You are listening, aren't you, what is happening outside? How can one live peacefully in such noise. That is why he is sad. It's noise all over here and through out from dawn to dusk."

"Pappu, let's go to the bazaar. It is Sunday today. They must have prepared special dishes. What will you eat, mutton or fish?" Uncle tries to pacify Pappu.

Pappu gets ready to flee from the ceaseless rumblings. Both

of them go to the Chandmari Bazar. Stopping his scooter near the market, Uncle instructs Pappu to stay there. Then Uncle goes to the fish market. Pappu is charmed by the sight of colourful goods arranged in rows in the nearby shops.

"Jhuk...jhuk...jhuk...jhuk..." A train approaches at great speed. The place where Pappu is standing is hardly forty feet away from the railway line. In no time, a train whizzes past Pappu after blowing a deafening whistle. Pappu covers his ears with his hands.

In the meanwhile, Pappu's friend Anup approaches him, blowing a colourful whistle. He comes and stands near Pappu. He also carries a toy-pistol in his other hand. "Wow! How beautiful!" Pappu wants to touch the pistol. "Look, how beautiful it is!" Saying this, Anup 'fires' into Pappu's ears three times, repeatedly. Pappu is startled. He cannot hear anything for quite some time. His ears were yet to recover from the shrill of the train's whistle and now this sound of the toy pistol! He could hardly endure it. He wants to cry out but with great difficulty holds himself back. Anup laughs at Pappu's helplessness. As soon as Pappu sees his Uncle, he begins to sob audibly.

"What's the matter? Were you feeling alarmed on being left alone?" Pappu shakes his head in the negative.

"Why are you crying then?" His Uncle asks surprised.

"Anup 'fired' into my ear!" States Pappu.

"You shouldn't do this. It has gun powder. It can harm the eyes also. And listen, an explosive sound near the ears can make young people like you dumb!" Scolded Uncle.

Anup listens carefully to Uncle's advise scratching the earth with his toe, feeling guilty.

"And mind you, remember one more thing," Uncle continues.



"As you grow old, you will realise that unwanted sounds are detrimental both to the body and the mind. Exposure to continuous noise can turn one not only deaf but dumb too!"

Uncle points at Pappu standing mutely, and tells Anup, "Look, look at him, how gloomy he appears! Don't repeat such things ever in future, okay?" Uncle starts his scooter.

At noon, all eat lunch together with Uncle. They talk about various things. But Pappu is tense.

"Pappu, why are you sulking while eating? Are you not feeling well?" His Mother asks him, offering some mutton. "My head is feeling strange, Mummy. Both the ears feel blocked." Putting his rice plate aside, Pappu says, "I don't feel like eating." Pappu goes to lie on the bed. His Mother puts the fan on after closing the door and begins to massage his head. Pappu falls asleep after a while.

"Tuun...tuun...tuun...tuun..." The clock strikes four. Pappu wakes up. He likes this sound. At four, he goes to play cricket in the grounds of a neighbouring school, daily. He jumps out of the bed. His Mother gives him milk and biscuits as soon as he freshens up. Meanwhile, a friend of his Father arrives. So, Mother gets busy.

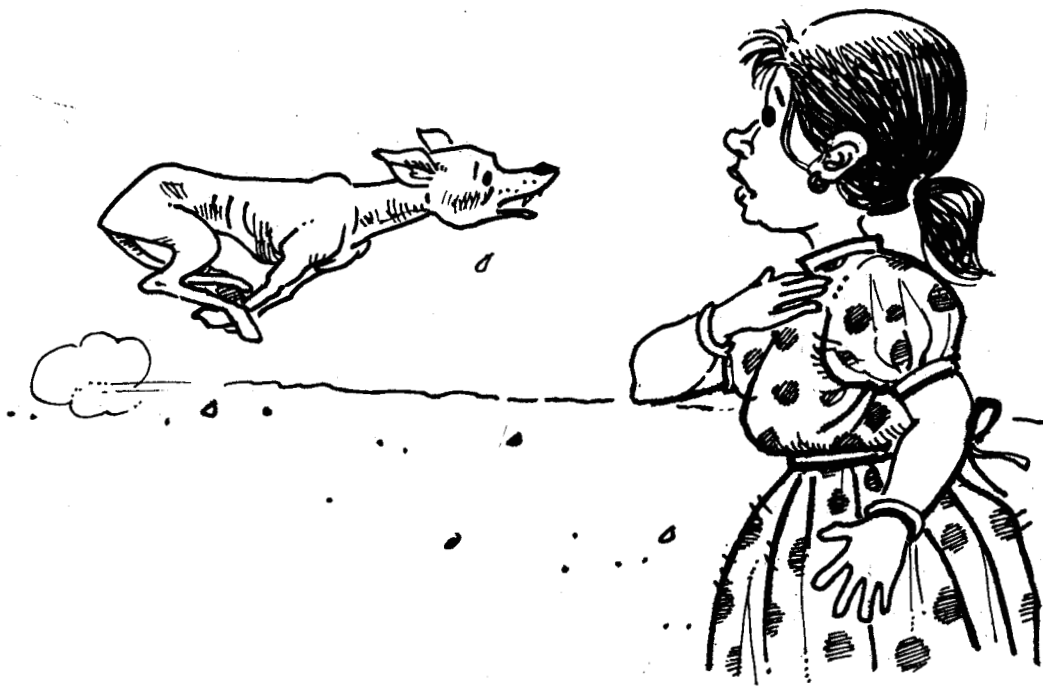
"Dhud...dhud...d...d...dhum!" A sheet of tin built to go up the roof of Mr. Bora's house falls off the bamboo stair-case. Perhaps, the labourers could not lay it properly! A dog had been sleeping down the stairs. He gets so frightened that he runs towards Pappu's house crying, "coun, coun!"

Pappu's sister was standing outside. Seeing the dog rushing towards her, she yelps and heads back home calling Mother. A bicycle lay against the door. She falls down after hitting the bicycle. The bicycle too falls. Hearing her loud cries, Pappu also

cries out, "Mummy, Mummy." Their Mother, who had been cutting betel-nuts inside the house, comes rushing out apprehending some danger. The betel-nut plate in her hands flies off. Everything happens all of a sudden. Pappu feels bad yet he smiles at the turn of events.

Before evening, Pappu is back home after playing. He is feeling cheerful now. Though he did not feel like studying in the evening, he sits down to do his 'home work'.

"Tim...tim...tim...tim..." Listening to the sweet sound coming at regular intervals, Pappu looks around. And then it gains momentum. "Tim...tim... tim..." What sound is this? Pappu tries to locate the source. He opens the window. It had started raining lightly. Coming out, he stretches both his hands. The rain drops that fall on the tin-roof produce a tick-tick sound. Pappu goes towards the side where the tick-tick sound is louder.



He sees a tin can lying upside down under the roof. The rain drops that fell on it produced that heavy sound.

The sweet sound of rain drops falling on the tinned roof of the house was rhythmical. Pappu is overjoyed on listening to this sound. He recalls his childhood when his mother used to sing lullaby to him with his head on her lap. He could experience the same enjoyment.

Outside his courtyard, he hears sounds of someone lifting and placing tin like objects. As if some persons were running here and there. "What's happening outside, Mummy?" Pappu asks his Mother. "It's raining. As the ceiling is freshly laid, it's not yet strong. It will get spoiled if not covered and protected from rain."

After dinner, Pappu goes to sleep. At midnight, his Mother is startled by Pappu's loud scream.

"What's happened Munna, are you dreaming?" Saying this, his mother embraces him. Pappu could not say anything. He is trembling with fear.

On being cajoled lovingly by his Mother, he narrates, "Some dark figure was pinning me down. I was frightened. I wanted to cry, but could not." He clung to his Mother with both his hands. His Mother and Father realise that the boy had reached this state due to over exposure to continuous intolerable and deafening sounds. The din was telling upon him not only during the day but it was also difficult for him to sleep peacefully at night. His Mother feels very sad. She caresses his forehead and tries to reassure him, "Don't get frightened, I am here with you!"

At dawn, Pappu is woken up by the chirping of birds. Mother had already left the bed. He gets up and comes out. A cool breeze is gently blowing outside. Peaceful atmosphere. He feels



frightened at the thought of last night's dream, but now he is feeling rather relaxed. With the tooth-brush in his mouth, he takes a round of the road outside. Then he comes back to wash his hands and face.

As soon as he is about to commence with studies, he is haunted by a whole series of monstrous noises that awaited him during the day!

Pappu's paternal Uncle is an assistant teacher in the Maniyari High School of Kamrup. He is known to all in the area as 'Hemen Master'. Two days before the Durga Puja, he comes to visit his brother in the Guwahati city. As soon as he saw Pappu, he asks, "Won't you go to the village? How long will you stay put here? This place is over-crowded. Your grandmother also wants to see you."

Pappu rushes to his mother. "Will you let me go with Uncle? I want to go with him." His Mother thinks that Pappu was not feeling good any way. His behaviour had been quite irritable last few days. Some days of outing will do him good. As she is making up her mind silently, he asks again, "May I go, Ma?"

"Okay, go!" On getting the permission, Pappu jumps with joy. He quickly puts two sets of clothes in his bag.

Next morning, Pappu gets up early all by himself. After taking bath and breakfast he was ready to leave with Uncle. They reached the Adabari bus stand from Guwahati by a city bus.

As they get down the bus, many helpers ask loudly, "Where will you go, where will you go?" Rangia, Nalbari, Barpeta, Dhubri, Shuvalkuchi—they moved around calling names of many places to the annoyance of passengers. The hawkers were also moving around the buses to sell betels, biri-cigarettes,



ground-nuts, newspapers, magazines, etc.

Pappu was curiously watching the buses approaching the bus stand, even the passengers and the bus-loaders. He was bored of hearing different kinds of bus horns. As soon as his Uncle called him to get into a bus, he complied and made himself comfortable in a seat behind the driver. Near the window so that he could watch the scenes outside.

The driver started the bus. A lot of passengers got in and the bus became jampacked. Pappu did not like the crowd. After a long wait, the bus started moving. It turned towards Jalukbari.

Gradually it picked up speed. Sitting beside the window, Pappu's body was exposed to the whiffs of strong winds. He felt excited. He kept on looking out of the window without turning his head.

"Pee...pee...pee..." The horn blew quite close to his ears. It nearly pierced his ears. Vexed, he started looking out of the window again. He gazed at houses, shops, large green fields across the road and the far off blue mountains. At times, he looked at other buses, ambassador cars and trucks, going past them. It seemed as if the plants and trees, the houses and the mountains were running backwards. He was fascinated by all these scenes.

The bus stopped at various places. People kept getting on and off the bus. Pappu could hardly make out how far they had travelled. But, finally the bus stopped. "Get down Pappu, we have reached," Uncle's voice broke his spell.

"We have reached so soon Uncle?" Pappu was surprised. "It takes an hour to reach here. It is just a distance of twenty miles only." Saying this, his Uncle got down the bus holding his bag. Pappu looked around as he got down.

It was a small town. Equal to Chandmari perhaps! Pappu thought. People were bee-lining for the bazaar and the 'puja'. A theatre was also on nearby for showing the 'puja'. The small town was reverberating with the sound of the mike. Pappu fretted again for a while at the noise of the horns of the cycle-rickshaws, motors and other vehicles.

Many cycle-rickshaws were lined in a queue. Uncle hailed one and sat on it along with Pappu. The rickshaw started rolling smoothly on the concrete road. There were houses lying scattered on both sides of the road along with shops and rows of big mango, black-berry, sonaru, sal and many other trees at the



corners. The rickshaw stopped at one spot.

"Can't go further. There are stones laid on the road. The tire will burst." The rickshaw-puller complained. Uncle paid him the fare and turned to Pappu, "Now we will have to walk down. It's not very far, by the way." Pappu was rather happy.

Pappu started walking swaying the bag on his back. As there were stones laid on the road, it was difficult to walk fast. A bullock-cart was approaching from the opposite direction. It was making a crackling sound over stones. The sound was so boring as to disturb Pappu again. Somehow, they covered the distance.

On seeing Pappu and Uncle walking down from a distance,

Manoj and Bipul, Uncle's sons, came running out. Taking the bag from their father's hands, they went inside along with Pappu.

"Ghutak...ghutak...ghutak!" Pappu heard the sound coming off the courtyard only. Reaching the verandah, he saw his grandmother crushing betel-nuts. As soon as she saw Pappu, she opened her toothless mouth, "Aha! Is it my dear love? I see you after so long!" Grandmother caressed Pappu's head lovingly. Manoj's mother and younger sister also came out. "It's so nice to see you here. Children keep enquiring about you. Come and freshen yourself!" She said.

"Ghatlak... ghatlak," came the sound as Manoj turned the tap on. The younger daughter of Uncle, Julie, came running to hand over a towel to Pappu. Wiping his hands and face, Pappu looked towards the courtyard.

There was a garden laden with betel-nuts. Along with it, there were mango, jack-fruit, coconut, lemon, *amla*, cassia, olive, plums, bay-leaf; in fact all kinds of trees and plants. The garden had been well maintained for cultivating vegetation. Birds were merrily chirping on the trees.

"Khut khut, khut khut, khutar!" Came the sound from the mango tree. Pappu could see a bird pecking at a thick branch of the mango tree. Watching Pappu staring that way, Manoj said, "This is the woodpecker bird. It pecks at the tree wood. Come, let's have tea." Serving coconut 'laddu' and steam-cooked rice-cake, his Aunt said, "It's time to have some snack. You can eat rice, coconut 'laddu' or rice-cake."

On learning about Pappu's arrival from Guwahati, a few neighbourhood friends of Manoj also came to meet him. They talked to him very affectionately after being introduced. Pappu felt good. He also accompanied them to the back of the court-

yard. He heard various birds chirping on the trees.

"It feels so nice to be here, I don't feel like living in Guwahati," Pappu stated looking at plants and trees all around. Manoj's friends Mahen and Fatik were surprised at this remark, and looked at each other.

"How surprising! You don't like the Guwahati city? How nice everything is over there. Large shops, bazaar, beautiful houses, museum, stadium, the zoo and what not!" Exclaimed Manoj. "How nice it would be to live in Guwahati. But even if we want to, we can't go there," sighed Fatik.

"Hatulook, hatulook, hatulook..." Pappu looked around for the source of this sound.

"Whose voice is this, brother Manoj?"

"This is a hatulook bird. It chirps at noon only. You will come across many kinds of birds if you live in the village. And will listen different voices too," said Manoj.

Impressed by the betel-nut grove, the pond and the birds, Pappu recalled a popular poem capturing the natural beauty of a village.

*What a beautiful village of ours
Everywhere are beautiful trees
Every branch laden with fruit and flowers
Exuding charm and beauty as far as one sees.*

"Come. All of you, come here, it's time to eat rice." Aunt called out loudly. Pappu, Manoj and Bipul headed for the kitchen. All members of the house sat down together on the floor. There was pigeon meat, fried banana flowers, sesamum seeds chutney and rice. 'How delicious the food cooked by Aunt tastes Pappu thought to himself.

After a hearty meal, all of them sat in the verandah. Grandma also arrived with the betel box. She offered crushed betel-nuts to Pappu. Seeing this, Manoj and Bipul also stretched out their hands.

"Take some rest Pappu, I will also do the same," Uncle suggested lying down. Pappu started shuffling through the pages of the books lying on Bipul's study table.

Then, he suddenly asked Uncle, "Shall we visit that hill?"

"Yes, we can. We have our fields over there."

Before evening, Pappu got ready to accompany Uncle. After walking down some distance through the village, there were bamboo bushes and open fields. On both sides of the road were ranged many wild trees like *nagabun*, *phutkula*, etc.

Suddenly, a pack of birds flew past Pappu. In no time, the chicks sneaked into the bushes. Pappu was delighted to see the chicks.

"What birds are these, Uncle?" Pappu asked joyously.

"They are wild hen. They live in the jungle only. They can fly. They also have a lot of enemies. Mongoose and jackals can eat them. So, the mother hen always accompanies its chicks.

Thus Pappu and Uncle walked a long distance. Pappu kept enquiring about many things every now and then. He walked leisurely through out the scattered forest, bamboo thickets and the rugged passes. There were no crowds of people here.

"Can you see those bamboo thickets? Beyond these lie the Kadamtala fields." Uncle pointed out with a finger. Pappu did not realise that he had by now covered a distance of two to three kilometres. At home, he couldn't walk even a small distance to school. He always waited for the bus.

After crossing a turn, Uncle claimed, "See, we have reached.

Come, let's sit by that pond. It'll be nice to view the fields from there." The sun rays were on the decline as evening was approaching. A gentle breeze rustled the leaves. Pappu sat under a date tree by the side of the pond. Uncle also sat beside him.

"Uncle, look at that duck! How beautiful it appears!" Pappu pointed towards the ducks floating in the pond.

"They peck on worms and other insects from the fields and



float here in the pond."

Pappu looked around. There were open fields as far as he could see. There were paddy fields in full bloom.

"These are Kadamtala fields. Our villagers own this land," Uncle stated.

The lush green fields swayed with winds. From a distance, it appeared as if green layers swayed to the tune of wind, just like waves of water in a floating river. Far beyond stood the blue mountain. Fragments of white clouds etched the open blue skies. Strong blowing winds slowly moved the clouds. It all seemed like a dream come true. Pappu felt at ease. He wanted to fly like the clouds in the open sky.

Pappu got up. He was spell bound! It was dusk time now. The sun had gradually started setting beyond the mountains. It had turned bright red. Pappu had never seen the sun so red. "Really, how beautiful it looks!" Pappu kept watching the sun at a stretch as it set behind the mountains.

Some of the ducks uttered 'tet tet' and flew into the sky. And then some more followed. Thereafter another pack. It appeared like a flying triangle to Pappu. He kept watching the pack of ducks till they disappeared into the sky. He felt mesmerised. Such a wonderful scene! It was far more beautiful than the scenes picturised in books.

"Let's go home, Pappu," Uncle broke the spell.

"I don't feel like going yet, Uncle. Why not stay here for some more time?" Pappu requested without moving his eyes from the sky.

"It's getting dark. Jackals and wolves come out at this hour." Pappu hastened closer to Uncle as soon as he heard the word 'wolf'.



"Uncle, we will come again," he declared and got up at once holding his Uncle's hand.

"Pappu, there is such a difference between the din of a city and the open and peaceful atmosphere of a village, isn't it?"

"Yes, Uncle. There is always a lot of noise in Guwahati. I don't feel at ease over there."

"Everyone likes a peaceful atmosphere. People feel relaxed in such an environment. A healthy mind has a healthy body too. Isn't it so?" Uncle glanced at Pappu. Pappu's face was agog with joy.

"Really Uncle! My body and mind are both at ease here."

"One feels better on the mountains or in a village after the din of the city. The heart rejoices with unknown happiness," Uncle claimed.

Pappu immediately responded, "Yes, Uncle, I am also feeling equally happy today." However, Pappu kept looking at the jungle while crossing the field lest there be a jackal or a wolf.

"This is the machine-age. There is a sharp rise in the number of motor vehicles, trains, planes and factories all around. That is why noise pollution is also on the rise. Television, radio, video, tape-recorder keep blaring from morning to evening."

"Uncle, our neighbours switch on the television at such a blast that we can't even study." Pappu and his Uncle were now walking through a rugged patch. Two persons carrying sacks filled with grass passed by. Pappu was walking holding his Uncle's hand.

"Apart from these, the sewing machine, cooler, generator, grinder, etc. are also used in homes. Nearly every house-hold in the city makes use of these types of machines. That is why noise is increasing day by day. Subjected to these unpleasant sounds, people are suffering from many diseases."

"Uncle, when the train sounded a whistle near my ears, I

suffered from headache for quite a few hours. What are the other diseases noise can induce?"

"In fact, the list of these diseases is very long. Headache, problem in nervous system, heart trouble, etc. are all due to this



noise. These diseases normally get cured in a peaceful environment."

"Does it mean that peaceful environment alone provides a remedy for these ailments?" Pappu asked surprisingly.

"Yes, almost like a remedy. And not an inconsequential remedy. Just look at yourself. Your mother told me a lot about you, that you have become irritable, make faces on trivial things and always complain of noise. And now after coming to the village, you seem to have recovered completely."

"Really, Uncle," Pappu smiled.

"And listen, the doctors also don't allow visitors to meet seriously ill people. They are not allowed to talk to them. This is because a peaceful atmosphere is essential for a recovering patient." Pappu listened to his Uncle with rapt attention.

"You can see for yourself when you visit a hospital. 'Please keep silence' is found written everywhere. Sounding of horn is also prohibited in front of the hospitals."

"Uncle, 'no horn please' is also written in front of our school."

"This is to enable children to learn what they read and write in a peaceful environment. That is why we should get up early in the morning to study. The morning time is the best of all times."

As soon as Uncle concluded, Pappu stated, "That's why I get up early in the morning to study. And if I am late, I just cannot study. Because it gets noisy!"

"Uncle, Uncle, look at this dog. Where is it coming from at this hour in the evening!" Pappu cried out.

"Is it a dog? Look carefully. It is a jackal. At this hour, they come out to prey on ducks, hens, pigeons, etc."

Pappu was frightened. What if there came out a lion! He



clung to Uncle. "Don't get frightened, we are about to reach home." Uncle held Pappu's hand.

Pappu was delighted at the peaceful environment of the open fields. The sight of setting sun and flying birds swam before his eyes. After some time, both of them reached the village.

It was evening time. Fragrance of *shewalifal* and *bakul* flowers was spreading all around.

"Wow! What a sweet fragrance!" Pappu drew a long breath. He wanted to draw in the entire sweet smell at one go.

"Dum...dum...dum...dudum...dudum..." A drum sounded in the village temple. The whole village echoed the sound of the drum. Uncle paid his obeisance raising both his hands to his forehead and saying, "Krishna, Krishna." Pappu liked the sound of the drum.

"Uncle, in Guwahati there is a temple at a short distance from our house. It is said that a drum, conch, bell and tal are played there but I have never been able to hear them."

"We have reached home. There is still a lot to tell you about



peaceful environment. I'll tell you later." Uncle opened the door of the courtyard.

Pappu went in after washing his hands and face. Uncle entered the 'puja ghar' after refreshing himself. Julie offered incense at the altar of God. Grandma was spinning on the wheel. A betel box and a betel-nut crusher lay nearby. Pappu came to sit on a bench in the verandah.

"To the beat of music sways the attractive lotus
And flowers in the garden..."

Pappu liked the song playing on the radio. Sitting comfortably on the bench, he closed his eyes. He had heard this song many times before but he liked it so much this evening that he hummed it along.

"Grandma, will you not visit our house? Stay there for a few days," Pappu urged, clinging to Grandma.

"No, my dear! In Guwahati, one has to stay put in the house only. I am better off here in this old age."

"How can one feel nice there? There is shortage of space. And on the top of it the noise of the city! People find it difficult to live." Uncle came out of the 'puja ghar' and sat beside Pappu.

"Uncle, you were saying something. Please tell me now."

"Yes, listen. You people also come close and listen," stated Uncle looking towards Bipul and Manoj. "People can do a lot of work in a peaceful environment. This is because the mind is relaxed. Peaceful environment has a special characteristic. You can call it energy. Unknowingly, we keep using this energy."

"How Uncle?" Pappu asked.

"Listen, when you are asked some question in an examination or by a teacher in the school, you have to think over it for a while to answer it, isn't it?"



"Of course, Dad, how can we answer without thinking over?" Stated Manoj.

"Sometimes you keep silent to recall forgotten things before replying, isn't it?"

"Yes, you are right," three of them nodded together.

"When people are confused, they cannot answer any question properly. After due thought only one should give an answer. I also get bewildered before starting a new project. I take a decision only at night when all are asleep," Uncle stated.

"One more thing. Absence of sound is also not a good sign. If there is no voice, how will one listen to another? What will you do then?"

Unable to contemplate an answer, the three fell silent.

"Will have to live like dumb people, understand? We will become deaf and dumb if we neither talk nor listen. We shall talk through sign language!" The three were surprised.

"We have learnt so many things today due to Pappu's presence here," claimed Manoj.

"There is a lot of noise in Guwahati. That is why there has been so much discussion on peaceful environment," Pappu explained. "Uncle, I want to stay in the village to study."

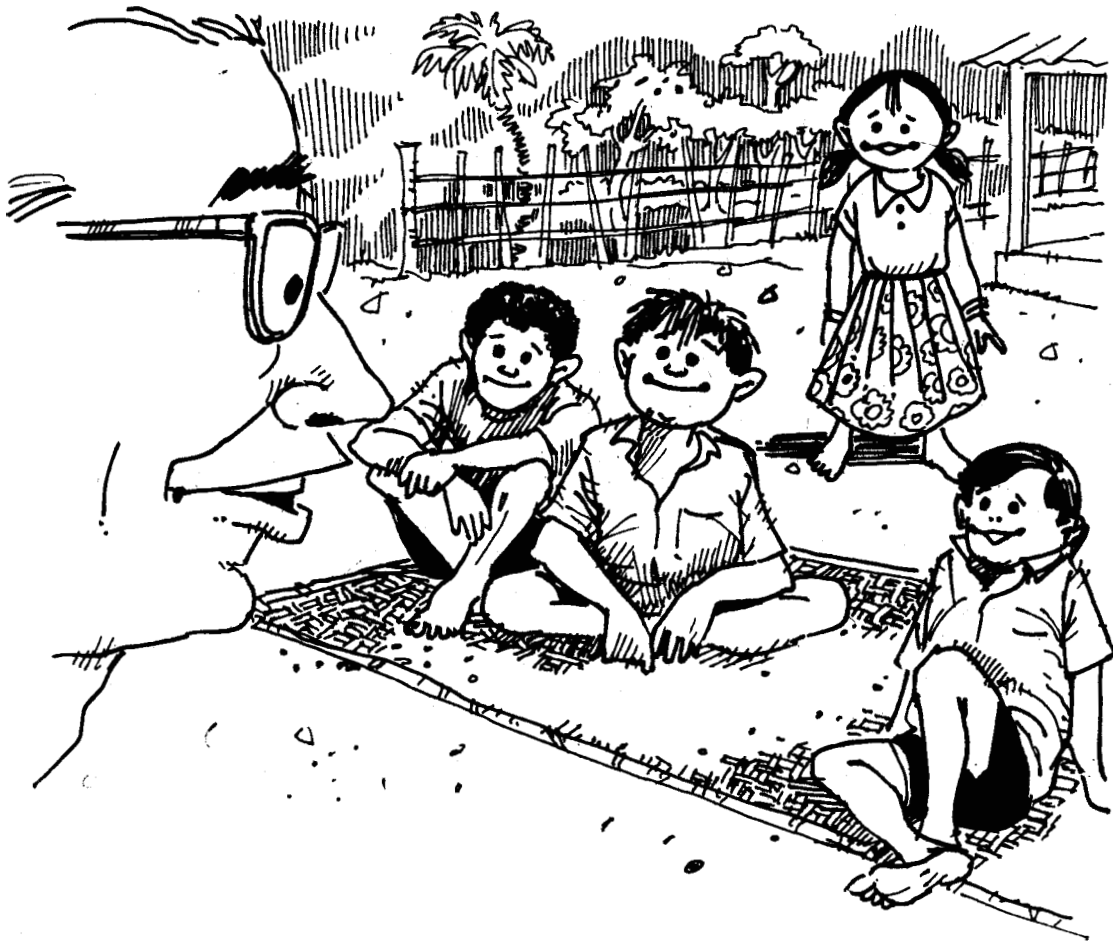
Manoj and Bipul were surprised on hearing this from Pappu. Julie burst out laughing, "What a boy, this Pappu! How nice it was for us to live in Guwahati!"

"This place is peaceful? Do you know how it was like where we got down from the bus? There is blaring noise of songs from the cassette shops from morning to night. Due to Durga Puja holidays now there is peace. You can see for yourself when the wood and rice mills start functioning. A new cinema-hall has been set up where a loud-speaker keeps bellowing endlessly.

Peaceful atmosphere has become a rare treat these days."

"It is very peaceful near the hills and in the fields, isn't it?" Bipul asked.

"Yes," said Uncle, "Barjhar airport is quite a few miles from here. Yet the sound of aeroplanes can be heard distinctly. Now-a-days, most of the houses even in the villages have radio and television. Televisions are tuned on throughout the day. We can learn many good things from television but it has a negative



aspect too. Instead of learning good things, children pick up bad things first," Uncle kept on saying in a humble tone.

"If the noise keeps on increasing day by day at this pace, we shall not find peaceful environment anywhere."

While talking thus, Aunt called them for dinner. By the time they retired for sleep after dinner, the clock had struck 9. But even at 9, the village looked as if it was midnight. In Guwahati, people had dinner only after watching the serials on television.

Since morning, Pappu had been moving about in fields and gardens, but he was still not tired. However, he lay on the bed. There was no sound from anywhere. Only his Aunt could be heard washing utensils. Occasionally, a stray sound of some vehicle passing far off interrupted the silence.

Pappu was trying to sleep. "Thap...thap..." Something was falling. The sound was light, but clear. After some time, the same sound was heard again.

"Thap...thap..."

"Manoj bhaiyya, what sound is this?" Pappu asked Manoj who was sleeping on the adjoining bed.

"Oh, this? It is betel-nuts falling. Wait and see how many betel-nuts you find lying on the ground in the morning." Manoj turned on his side.

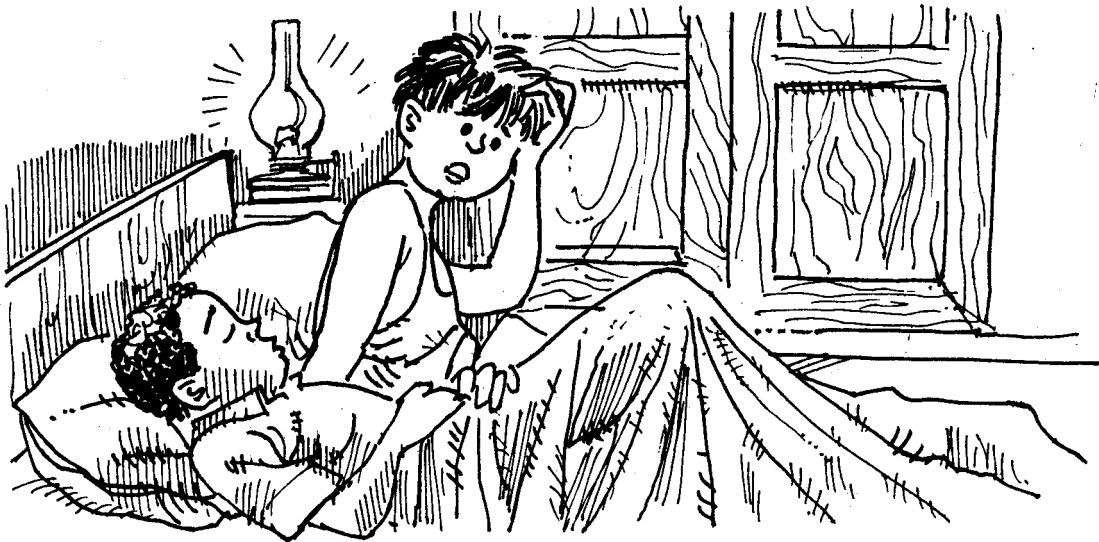
There was a howl of owls once or twice. And then the gutter... goon... of the pigeons. Gradually, the night advanced. Pappu did not realise when he fell asleep.

Pappu got up from sleep and opened his eyes. "Kukroon... koon..." the cock was crowing. The birds were also merrily chirping. Pappu always listened to this sound of the birds in Guwahati. Earlier he used to detest the cawing of crows. He scared them away with a catapult or chased them with a mirror.





But this morning he did not mind the crow's cawing. Pappu got up and sat on the bed. Towards the eastern half, the sky was brightening up. Birds could be seen flying in packs. There was hustle and bustle of birds chirping everywhere. A cool gentle breeze was blowing outside.



“What a fine morning!” Pappu cried out unknowingly.

He got up and came out of the room in the open. Some boys were taking cows and buffaloes out for grazing. Manoj also got up and brought out his cows and buffaloes.

Manoj and Bipul asked Pappu many questions about Guwahati, about the games played in the stadium, about the library and so on. They were interested in sports. Pappu patiently replied to all their queries. Chatting thus, Pappu, Manoj and Bipul headed for the village.

All the three kept talking while moving around the fields. This is how Pappu managed to learn a lot about many unknown and unseen things.

It so happened that one day, Manoj took his cattle to the large pond near the temple. Pappu also accompanied him. After the cows had quenched their thirst with water, they sat beneath the trees beside the pond. It was afternoon time. The sun was very bright.

“Chereng...chereng...chereng...”

A cricket shrilled from the nearby tree. The sound of the cricket broke the peace of the noon. Then there was a kot kot sound which came from the side of the pond. Whose sound and where from? Thinking thus, they looked around. They saw a snake holding a frog in its grip.

“Let’s go Pappu, snakes and frogs come out of hiding at noon.” Manoj stood up. Some black bees were flying in the temple. The sounds of the cricket and the frog had already alarmed Pappu. The temple reverberated with the sounds of all these creatures. Pappu did not like any noise at all. But Pappu did not like this lonely noon either. He came back home early with Manoj.



Lunch time was approaching. Just then, "Uncle has come, Uncle has come," Julie jumped about excitedly.

"Pappu, Uncle has come to take you," Bipul shouted from a distance.

Pappu's heart started pounding.

"Why have you come so soon Papa?" Pappu complained with a sigh.

"Your school is about to open. It has already been a week since you came here." Stated Pappu's father as he sat down after washing his hands and face. Pappu ran to the water tap. Then, hastened to the kitchen to stand near his Aunt.

"Food has been served, go and eat. I am going to serve your father too," she suggested. Aunt noticed that he was idly scratching the wall. His face was dull and eyes filled with tears.

"The schools are going to open, isn't it? It will harm your studies in case you stay here for long. Go, go and eat your food," Aunt guided him to the food plate, lovingly.

Manoj, Bipul and Julie felt sad at the news of Pappu's likely departure. Pappu did not realise how and when a week passed by!

Pappu paid his respects to Grandma, Uncle and Aunt. All of them came outside the house to see him off. Pappu did not want to leave. Both his eyes were filled with tears.

Pappu hardly comes back from the village when his friends Myna, Jeetu, Laatu, Babu, and John—all surround him.

"Wow, you have been to the village for so many days! How did you feel there? Didn't want to come back?" All of them shower questions one after the other.

"Just wait. I'll tell everything," Pappu says, taking off his shoes, "You know what, one doesn't feel like coming back from the village."

"Really?" John asks surprised. "What did you like there? My mother doesn't allow me to visit my Grandma's house. She



says that villages are filthy. The pond water is also dirty. People don't maintain cleanliness. They don't have proper bathrooms as well," saying this, Laatu makes a wry face.

"Wrong. Just go and see how good the village is! No noise of any sort. Very peaceful. That's why I like it."

"Do children play there?" Jeetu asks Pappu coming closer to him.

"Why not? There is a huge big ground. The atmosphere is wide open. You will also feel like going there if you hear about



the village. Wait, my aunt has sent sweets and 'laddus'," he offers them sweets.

"The plant and trees in the village are rich and greener than this place. The fields are also very beautiful. Come, let's go and sit in the drawing room." All of them go together.

"How is it possible? Trees are the same everywhere." Jeetu protests.

"I am telling you the truth. You know, one feels like looking at the open ground again and again. The mountains, the plants, trees everything. I had accompanied Uncle to the fields of the village. I cannot describe how good I felt there." All attentively listen to Pappu. "How beautiful is the setting sun! The moon, the stars and the sky all look very charming in the village."

"The moon, the stars, the sun are all the same everywhere. Why will they look more beautiful in the village?" Laatu remarks like elderly person.

"Go and see for yourself if you feel that I am telling a lie. It is din here, from morning to evening. It's not the same there. Peace, only peace prevails everywhere. That's why the mind is at ease there, and when the mind is at ease, everything looks fine."

"Know what Pappu, I also feel like going to the village after listening your story. I don't like the din at all. Mamma always says—study...study... But I don't feel like studying!" Myna sadly states.

"If there is a lot of noise, I put on the head-phone and keep listening to songs. How enjoyable!" Jeetu boasts.

"My elder brother studies only after turning the radio or TV on. How strange it is!" Says Laatu.

"Very few can do this! They are different. My Uncle says

that these noises harm us unknowingly."

"My mother keeps watching TV herself and doesn't leave any film. And to me she keeps harping—study, study. I feel very angry," Myna angrily states.

"TV and radio are not played in our house during the study hours. And whenever they are played, it is at a very low pitch. But the tenants in the neighbourhood play it so loudly that it becomes difficult to study," Babu adds.

"We listen to a number of sounds from morning to evening. In fact, we have become accustomed to them. We are also bored of them. However, the damage they inflict on us will surface by and by," Pappu laments engrossed in thoughts.

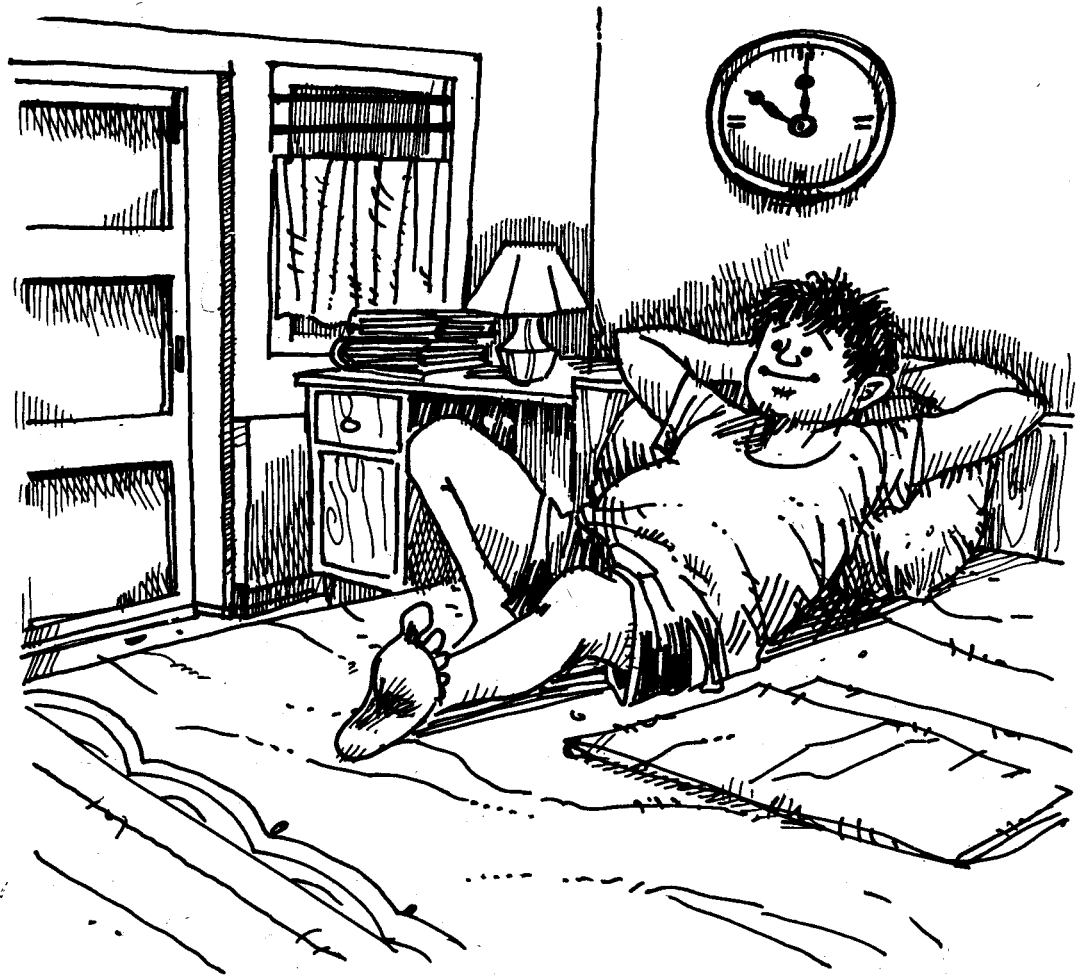
All of them keep talking about various things. They discuss seriously like elders in a family. It gives birth to a number of queries in Pappu's mind. He decides to discuss them openly and thoroughly with his friends later.

As the day passes and it is evening time, he secures his books. He does not feel like studying. The village scenes keep surfacing in front of him one by one. Gradually, he falls asleep.

Pappu gets up early the next day and takes to studies after washing his hands and face. After some time, he notices that the banana-seller, the egg-seller, the hawkers—no one has come! Generally, they come one after the other and shout continuously. Also, there is no sound of motor cars or any other vehicles. Even the factories are silent. There is no sound except that of chirping birds. Pappu likes this peace. But, he becomes anxious.

"Mamma, Mamma, motors are not running today. The egg-seller and the banana-seller have also not come!" Pappu goes to his Mother leaving the table.

"Assam state is *bandh* today. Have you forgotten?"



"Oh yes, it is a *bandh* today!" He rushes to the garden with joy. Opening the gate of the courtyard, he comes out. Jeetu, Laatu, John, Moon and Babu also accompany him.

"Do you know, the village is peaceful like this. We will enjoy a lot today." Pappu states laughing to himself.

"I will be able to ride my bicycle today!" Jeetu jumps with joy. Due to the pacing motor-cars, Jeetu's mother did not let him ride the bicycle.

"Let's walk upto the end of the road." All of them happily reach the gates of the zoo. "See, how wide the road is! There is nothing anywhere," John states surprised. All of them keep looking at the deserted road.

"We will play cricket here today." They all like John's idea and clap happily.

"Were it always like this, we could study much better." Pappu comments like an elderly person, "Why don't we do one thing?"

"What?" All of them ask in unison.

"All our neighbours listen to TV and radio at a high volume. Even at John's house, the drum-set is played at a high pitch. We can request them to tune these at low volume." Pappu suggests.

"You are right Pappu. All of us live here. We can request people to listen to Radio and TV at a low pitch," says Babu.

"No, no. This is not done. We are too young; no body will take us seriously. Reetu bhaiyya plays the drum-set at such a high volume with his friends. If I object, he scolds me and asks me to leave if I have complaints."

"You are right. But all of us will go together to each house. They will surely listen to us. We will try to make them understand how we face difficulty in studies," Pappu states.

"Alright. It's Sunday tomorrow. We will do this tomorrow itself. Let's go home now. Do come to play in the evening." All of them leave for their homes.

In the evening, they play cricket together. Today they play freely on a road which they otherwise dread to cross. It makes them laugh. Some people take their photographs. Later, they come to know that these people were media men. Pappu, Laatu and the rest, all are very happy. They play whole heartedly till

it becomes dark. Even their parents do not impose any restrictions.

"Tuun...tuun...tuun... Dudum...dudum...dudum..."

In the evening, the drum is sounded in the temple. The conch is also blown. Pappu, John and Moon strain their ears to listen carefully. It seemed as if they were listening to the sound of the drum and the conch for the first time. The whole vicinity reverberates with the sound of the drum and the conch. The neighbouring hills echo the sound. All are delighted.

Next morning, Pappu begins his studies. Laatu's tenants play the radio at a high pitch. Pappu gives it a thought, it is high time to talk to them. Pappu goes to Laatu, "All of us will do what we had decided yesterday. Call John, Moon, Babu, Jeetu, Myna and others."

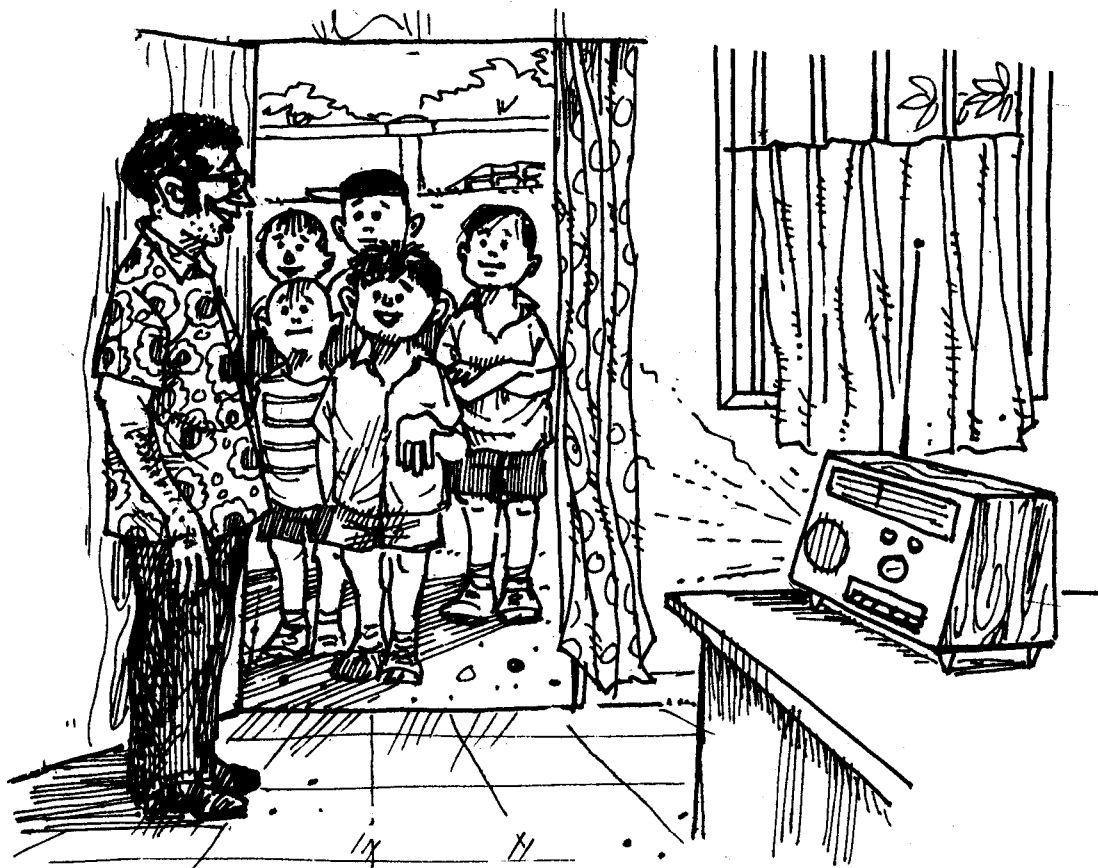
"Thuk...thuk...thuk..." First of all, Pappu's team goes to Mr. Barua's house, the tenants of Laatu. They cannot hear the knock at the door because of the high volume of the radio. They knock harder now.

As soon as the door opens, Mr. Barua sees so many boys together and thinks that they have come asking for some donation. "What donation," he enquires. They feel like laughing but manage to stifle it.

"Good morning, Uncle. We have not come asking for any donation, but to make an appeal," Pappu talks politely suppressing his laughter.

"Come on, what do you want to say?"

"We would like to request you to lower the volume of your radio, please. If the neighbours play the radio and television at full volume, we shall find it difficult to study. Examinations are also close at hand." Pappu explains.



Mr. Barua is about to say something when Laatu intervenes, "We have come to your house first. Then we shall visit each house in the neighbourhood and request the same."

"It's a good gesture. We never thought that playing radio and television at high pitch puts you to inconvenience," Mr. Barua submits feeling guilty.

"It's not a question of studies only, Barua Uncle! Subjected to constant high pitched sounds, children can become deaf. There



can be many other ailments as well." John comments like a mature person.

"I never thought that young children like you will come up with bright ideas. I am happy at the way you have taken up this challenge. It's all right; do tell me if you need any help."

Mr. Barua praises Pappu's team admiring their courage. Emboldened by Mr. Barua's response, they march ahead opening the gate of the courtyard of the next house.